

Ways and Means Human Resources Subcommittee Chairman Dave Reichert
Floor Statement on H.R. 4980, The “Preventing Sex Trafficking and
Strengthening Families Act”
July 23, 2014

I rise today to urge support for H.R. 4980, the *Preventing Sex Trafficking Strengthening Families Act*.

This bill reflects bipartisan agreements between the House and Senate on three bills passed by the House and by the Senate Finance Committee in the past year.

It is designed to prevent sex trafficking involving youth in foster care, strengthen families by increasing adoptions from foster care, and improve child support collections.

This issue is very personal to me. I spent over 33 years working in law enforcement, including serving as the Sheriff of King County, Washington. During that time, I saw firsthand the tragedies kids face when they’re not cared for by loving parents, when they run away, and when they end up on the streets.

On August 12, 1982, I was called to investigate the death of a young woman whose body was found in Kent, Washington’s Green River. Little did I know it at the time, but finding this victim began what became a two-decade hunt for a man now known as the Green River Killer. Once caught, he confessed to killing more than 70 young women who had been involved in the sex trade.

The first known victim of the Green River Killer was Wendy Coffield. She was 16 when she died. Wendy was living in a foster home in Tacoma, Washington when she ran away, but because she’d run away before, no one was really looking for her. We need to do more to protect kids like Wendy Coffield, and that’s what this bill will do.

To better understand this issue, we held three subcommittee hearings in which we brought in experts to talk about ways to strengthen our current system. At these hearings, we heard from victims like Miss “T” Ortiz Walker Pettigrew, who was recently named by Time Magazine as one of the 100 most influential people in the world. “T” spent the first 18 years of her life in the foster care system, and during 7 of those years she was sexually trafficked on the streets, over the internet, in strip clubs, in massage parlors, and even in the back pages of express papers. During our hearing, “T” said that the most consistent relationship she ever had in foster care was with her pimp and his family. I think we can all agree that our nation’s children deserve better.

This bill will require States to identify victims of sex trafficking and provide them with the services they need to heal. It will also improve data on instances of child sex trafficking so better policies can be developed to prevent it.

Also on the prevention front, the bill makes sure that youth in foster care can participate in age-appropriate activities – so they are less vulnerable to trafficking – and encourages States to move children out of foster care and into loving families more quickly.

The approach we are taking is practical, bipartisan, and based on State experience. This bill incorporates a wide range of ideas gleaned from bills introduced by Members of the Ways and Means Committee like Mr. Paulsen, other members of the House, and over 150 pages of public comments received on our December 2013 discussion draft.

I want to thank the Subcommittee's Ranking Member, Mr. Doggett, *who joins me on the floor today*, as well our Chairman, Mr. Camp, and Ranking Member, Mr. Levin, for support of this legislation, and for their help throughout its development.

I also want to thank the many outside groups who offered their feedback and their support. As of today, we have received support for the bill from 48 child welfare groups, which is an indication of the importance of this legislation, its broad support, and its potential to improve the lives of children across the country.

I can't think of a more important, or more bipartisan, topic than protecting vulnerable children in foster care and working to find loving homes for each of them. That's why we are here today. This is an area where members of both parties - from both the House and Senate - have worked together to help children. I urge all members of the House to support H.R. 4980 today so the Senate can take action soon, and the President can sign it into law without delay.

I reserve the balance of my time.

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